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ABSTRACT

This study explores how and why parents choose to enroll their children in certain schools, and what criteria they apply in making an enrollment decision. Fourteen families with 10 typical and 6 special children were interviewed in depth about their experiences with preschool and school enrollment and their expectations regarding their children's next schools. Based on the comments made during these interviews, a questionnaire was designed and administered to all 66 families (of which 42 responded) with children currently enrolled in a small, private, alternative school. Three assumptions, made by advocates of parental choice, were examined: (1) that parents are dissatisfied with public schools; (2) that, given the opportunity, parents explore various alternatives before deciding where to enroll their child; and (3) that parents evaluate their children's educational needs and choose accordingly. Based on interviews and questionnaires alike, the study calls into question all three of these assumptions. Specific findings from the questionnaire and selected illustrative excerpts from the interview are included, along with footnotes and a bibliography. (TE)

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Parental Perspectives on the School Enrollment of 'Special' and 'Typical' Children

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The purpose of this study is to explore how and why parents enroll their children in the schools that they do. Why do parents engage in an active search for a school? How do they go about such a search? What criteria do they apply in making an enrollment decision?

Answers to these questions are important for an understanding of a number of public policy proposals in the area of school enrollment which have been advanced in recent years. Among these proposals are education vouchers, tuition tax credits, magnet schools, open enrollment plans and voluntary transfer plans. Seemingly unrelated, but of special relevance for this study, are the provisions of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (p.L. 94-142) which "mandate a 'free appropriate' public education for all youngsters with disabilities... (and) require parent involvement in child placement decisions and permit parent recourse in the event that the child's placement or services seem unsuitable."[1]

Issues relating to parental choice in school enrollment have been the focus of a relatively small number of empirical studies. The first, most ambitious and most frequently cited study was conducted by the Rand Corporation in connection with the so-called "public school voucher demonstration" funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity and later the National Institute of Education in the Alum Roch school district of San Jose, CA. This demonstration project was intended to test an education voucher plan developed by the Center for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP). However, the CSPP plan (1970) had to be so extensively modified before any school district would agree to implement it that it became a focus of dispute among those with an interest in vouchers (See Weiler (1974), Coons and Sugarman (1978) and Murnane (1979)). The major conclusion to be drawn from this demonstration project appears to be that "Even when schools

provide free transportation for children who attend non-neighborhood schools, the geographical location of the alternative schools is the most important factor in parents' placement decisions."[2]

Another study of school enrollment was conducted by Nault and Uchitelle (1982) in an affluent suburban community with pre-existing optional attendance zones. Children who lived in these zones did not have a designated neighborhood school (although a few parents thought that one or the other of their options was the neighborhood school). Nault and Uchitelle conclude that "The majority of the parents we studied... seemed most intent on forging an optimal match between their childrearing agendas, their children's needs, and the instructional and social press of the school."[3]

A third study, conducted by Clerico (1982), explored the reasons why parents enrolled their children in the "Central New York Christian School". Clerico found that the parents he interviewed "view the public schools of today as eschewing the social, moral and religious values and practices public schools advocated when they themselves were students a generation ago." He concludes that these parents sought "a configuration of education" (borrowing a phrase from Public Education by Lawrence Cremin) "within which the school functions as only one component among a variety of social institutions all having intentional educative foci."[4]

And finally, Barnes (1978) conducted a study of peer interaction between typical and special children (the latter mostly autistic or with similar language development delays) in a small private school which has been a pioneer in mainstreaming such special children. Included in the study were interviews with the parents of typical students, regarding whom she concludes, "Their motives were not necessarily altruistic (i.e. to benefit the special children in the school): they clearly were seeking

the best educational program for their own child."[5] Interestingly, although this schcol has focused its attention on developing effective programs for integrating children with autistic or related conditions with their typical peers, no interviews with parents of special children were included in Barnes' study. Nor have I been able to identify any other studies which included interviews with parents of special children regarding school enrollment, although there is a considerable advocacy literature as well as some studies of state and school district policy in this area (See, for example, Richmond (1983), Cohen et. al. (1979), Miller and Switzky (1979) , and Swan (1984)).

Research method, design and setting:

Of the four studies described above, the first two were done using structured questionnaires, while the third and fourth used loosely structured interviews. Each of these methods has its advantages. The structured questionnaire can be administered to more people with a comparable amount of effort, and yields data which can be analyzed and presented numerically. The loosely structured interview takes more time to administer and yields data which is difficult if not impossible to quantify, but it also is capable of yielding insights beyond what the interviewer might previously have considered.

For this study, these two techniques were used in combination. First, fourteen families, with ten typical and six special children enrolled at Bolidena (a 20% sample), were interviewed in depth about their experiences with pre-school and school enrollment and their expectations regarding their children's next schools. Then, based on the comments made during these interviews, a questionnaire was designed,

pilot tested with two families, and then distributed by the school to all 66 families with children currently enrolled there. Forty-two questionnaires were returned (a 63% response rate).

"Bolidena" (the name comes from two Hindi words meaning "speech" and "to give") is the same school that was the site for Barnes' study (she called it "Jasmine"). It is a small, private school founded as an alternative school in 1969. During the early years of its existence, it attracted the attention of several parents of handicapped or "special" children, who were looking for an alternative setting where their children could receive the kind of individualized attention that they seemed to require. In 1975, with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Bolidena adopted its present focus of mainstreaming autistic or language-delayed children. Such children now make up about one-third of the total enrollment of about seventy students (1982-83). Their tuition is paid by grants from the state channeled through local school districts (for school-aged children) or Family Court (for pre-schoolers, ages three to five). The other two-thirds of the students are typical children whose parents, mostly professional who live in a neighborhood near a major university, pay their tuition.

At the time this study was begun, in February, 1983, there was a very real possibility that Bolidena might be forced to close because of a dispute with the state agency which funded the special children. For several years, Bolidena had been enrolling children between the ages of three and eight. However, the administrator of the state agency believed that school-aged special children educated in a mainstreamed environment with public funds should be educated in public schools. The staff and advisory board of Bolidena believed that without these state funds, the entire school

would be forced to close. Eventually it was decided that Bolidena could continue to receive state funds for pre-school children through Family Court. Bolidena reopened in September, 1983 without any six to eight-year-olds but with an expanded enrollment of three to five-year-olds. In the meanwhile, however, the parents of all the children in the school had been forced to consider what they would do if the school closed completely.

Findings:

As was noted above, the purpose of this study was to examine how and why parents enroll their children in the schools that they do. The reasons for choosing this particular setting included: (1) taking advantage of whatever insights might be gained from contrasting the situations of professional parents of typical children (for whom a relatively large range of alternatives might be available) and parents of special children (for whom the range of alternatives was expected to be very limited); (2) studying a group of families all of whom were being forced to consider what alternatives were available to them; and (3) working in a relatively small setting which would lend itself to being a pilot study for a more extensive study of parental decision-making in school enrollment to be undertaken in 1984-85.

This report seeks to examine three assumptions underlying a variety of public policy proposals relating to parental choice. These assumptions relate to: (1) parents' preferences for public vs. private schools; (2) parents' search processes; and (3) parents' school selection criteria.

(1) Advocates of parental choice of school plans assume that substantial numbers of parents are dissatisfied with the public schools which are available to them under existing enrollment arrangements. This is especially

true for advocates of education vouchers and tuition tax credits, who believe that many parents prefer private schools and keep their children in public schools only because of financial necessity. Advocates of public alternative schools (see Fantini (1973) and Smith et. al. (1976)) believe that many public school parents are dissatisfied with public schools as they are, but that the problem can be dealt with by offering alternatives within the public school system. Advocates of magnet schools (see McMillan (1980) see such schools as a means of desegregating inner city schools. They do not assume any significant dissatisfaction with neighborhood schools on the part of white parents, but they do assume that such parents are not firmly committed to their neighborhood schools and can be attracted elsewhere by special and unique programs.

Considering that this study was based on interviews with parents who had enrolled their children in a private school, there is relatively weak evidence of dissatisfaction with public schools. To be sure, the school was founded by parents of typical children who wanted an alternative to the public schools, but that had been fourteen years earlier. Barnes, in her interviews with parents of typical children in the same school about seven years ago, found that "Seven of the parents made comments about seeking an alternative to public school, either because their child had already had a negative experience there (three) or because they anticipated one (four)."[6] But by the time of this study, parents of typical children with serious reservations about public schools were in the minority.

It must be remembered that most of the children at Bolidena, even prior to the crisis with the state which ended the school-aged classes, had entered Bolidena before they were old enough to attend public school full-time. At the point of entry, the alternatives for most parents had

been between Bolidena and a pre-school, day care center or perhaps half-day public school Kindergarten. Beth (see page 8) is typical of parents who worked and needed a full-day Kindergarten program, which Bolidena provides.

Another aspect of the situation is that parents of typical children, who tended to be relatively open to the needs of handicapped children (even if that was not, as Barnes found, their primary reason for choosing Bolidena), also tended to be liberal in other respects. Maria (see page 8) is typical of parents who viewed the public schools favorably because they wanted their children exposed to "a wide variety of children". To such parents, private schools seemed to be an elite, privileged enclave with which they felt uncomfortable.

There were, to be sure, a few parents who tended to be skeptical that the public schools would provide the kind of educations they wanted for their children. Becky (see page 8) is one such parent, although even in her case, had she and her family lived in certain suburban areas, or even in another section of the city, she might have enrolled her son in a public school for 1983-84. As it was, she was one of the few who transferred her child to another private school.

In contrast, most parents of special children were very apprehensive about sending their children to public schools. All had definite opinions about public schools, either from having taught in them (Shirley), hearing about problems friends were having (Lydia) or reflecting on their own school experiences (Larry). They tended not to want their children isolated in special classrooms (after having experienced mainstreaming at Bolidena), but they felt that teachers in regular public school classrooms would be poorly equipped to deal with their children's special needs.

The contrast between parents of typical and of special children is illustrated in the responses to question 21 of the questionnaire (see page 9).

PARENTS' PUBLIC/PRIVATE SCHOOL PREFERENCES

(from interviews)

Parents of special children:

Shirley: At Bolidena they have time for every child, time for every child's needs. We can't realistically expect that in the public schools. The teacher there has to deal with everything, so there's time for major things but not minor things. Here the children can be in touch with themselves, with their feelings, and can develop really good self-concept. It would take longer to do that in the public school. Kids are taught here to verbalize their feelings of anger or sadness. There's no way a public school teacher can do that all the time.

Lydia: Some people I know in our district have a daughter who has a variety of problems, including overweight and poor vision. She wasn't supposed to be going up and down stairs. She was allergic to Raid, but they went ahead and sprayed Raid in the rooms where she'd be. She couldn't read dittoes, but they gave her dittoes to work on. They always had excuses: "we can't afford it" or "we can't find it". She's in seventh grade now, and they're still fighting for things they have a right to for her. And the school's still putting them off. That might not be fair to them, but that's what I've heard. So I hope I don't have a problem with Shawn [when he leaves Bolidena and goes to public school].

Larry: I went to city schools. I remember there were one or two kids in our class who... were getting speech therapy. One was a real trouble-maker, and ended up dropping out in eighth or ninth grade. I had a good experience..., but some of the kids picked on other kids a lot who were in any way different.... I'm apprehensive Peter may be picked on...

Parents of typical children:

Beth: Bolidena is a lot of money. One attractive thing about public school is not having to spend that money. In Kindergarten, we would have had to spend that money anyway. It had to be a full-time Kindergarten because of our schedules. We both work.

Maria: There's the factor of integration, not necessarily with handicapped kids, but certainly with a wide variety of children. We wouldn't want our kids in a school where all the children were white and come from two-parent families with incomes over X number of dollars. Wide variety is an important factor.

Becky: I'm extremely interested in Brian having opportunities to learn about computers. I think kids these days must have a working knowledge of them. The principal of our neighborhood public school is interested in introducing computers, but the teachers are resisting it.... When the principal at the neighborhood school talked about the computer issue, we thought that might be representative of what we might encounter on other issues as well. We wanted a more open, less traditional curriculum.

PARENTS' PUBLIC/PRIVATE SCHOOL PREFERENCES

(from questionnaire)

Question 21: As regards enrolling your child in a private school (please disregard availability, cost, location and other limiting factors) versus a public school, which of the following best expresses your feelings?

A. I strongly prefer public school and would not consider another private school after Bolidena.
B. I prefer public schools in general, but would consider a private school if it best met my child's needs.
C. Public or private makes no difference to me; I'd pick the school that best meets my child's needs.
D. I prefer private schools in general, but would consider a public school if it best met my child's needs.
E. I strongly prefer private school, and would not consider a public school.

Responses

by 28 mothers of typical children (T)

and 14 mothers of special children (S)

T-A ¶	4%	S-A	0%
B <<<<<<<<<<<<<	46%	B >>>>	14%
C *********	25%	C ++++++++++++++++++++	72%
D #######	25%	D §§§§	14%
E	0%	E	0%

ACTUAL ENROLLMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING SCHOOL YEAR

(from questionnaire and school records)

41 typical children (T) and 27 special children (S)

Bolidena	T <<<<<<<<<<<<<<<	54%
	S >>>>>>>>>>>>	41%
Public school	T **********	39%
	S ++++++++++++++++	56%
Other private school	T ###	7%
	S §	4%

TYPES OF SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY MOTHERS

(from questionnaire and interviews)

31 mothers of typical children (T) and 17 mothers of special children (S)

Public schools only:	T: 52%	S: 71%
Parochial schools only:	19%	17%
Other private schools only:	3%	0%
Public and parochial schools:	3%	12%
Public and other private schools:	23%	0%

While half the mothers of typical children preferred public schools, and another quarter had no preference, almost three quarters of the mothers of special children expressed no preference. Despite the overwhelmingly positive experiences that all parents reported with Bolidena, very few were particularly favorable toward private schools in general. This is all the more striking when one considers that 48% of the mothers of typical children and 29% of the mothers of special children had received at least part of their own educations in some kind of private school.

(2) Advocates of parental choice assume that given the opportunity, parents will explore various alternatives before deciding where to enroll their child in school. This assumption seems basic to any conception of rational decision-making. In particular, it underlies the model of economic rationality in a free competitive market, the model which first gave rise to the education voucher concept over twenty years ago. It is retained in the public alternative schools proposal. Even the magnet school concept assumes that parents will compare at least two alternatives, their neighborhood school and the magnet school.

The evidence from Bolidena parents with regard to examining various alternatives is mixed. As regards parents of typical children, some (like Alicia - see page 11) were referred to the same school from several different sources, and gave little consideration to other alternatives. Others, such as Beth (see page 11) got similar messages but decided to check out other possibilities anyway. While Beth's search behavior certainly fits the rationality model, Alicia's is definitely more problematic, although one might argue that it would be irrational to expend limited time and energy exploring several alternatives if one felt there was a high probability that one would end up with the first alternative anyway.

PARENTS' SEARCH PROCESSES

(from interviews)

Parents of special children:

Rachel: He wasn't speaking. He made some hand movements that didn't mean much to us at the time. He wasn't sitting still. He was very rigid, in that he wanted things to always be the same. He wasn't interacting with other kids, although he would make some eye contact with adults. One of his doctors said he was "excitable". Another said he was "lazy". At that point, we switched doctors.... His new doctor didn't know Peter at first, so he was hesitant to say anything. But we were concerned that Peter wasn't talking, so finally he referred us to the Speech and Language Testing Center.

That was a total disaster. They kept trying to get him to do things he just couldn't do, like stack blocks or draw pictures. There was nothing they could help him with because he wasn't talking, so they sent us to Bolidena.

Larry: We didn't know anything about the school. They showed us the classroom where they were going to put him, and pointed out a kid who had been totally uncontrollable when he entered. By then, he was sitting in a chair. They were definitely interested in Peter. Then they put it back on us. Did we want to send him there?

We didn't know anything about the school. But my brother did some checking and said it had a good reputation. He worked on that side of town and had some connections. We didn't know what else to do. We had no place else to go. So we sent him there.

Grace: Greg can't go back to Bolidena next year. So last week we had his Committee on the Handicapped meeting. Maureen and Sophie (Bolidena teachers) were there. I knew what I wanted. Norwood. Maureen and I were agreed on that. Maureen and Sophie did most of the talking.... The director of special education in the district listened a lot to what we had to say and took lots of notes. He also explained about the program in the city school district. But they're not geared for Greg. I don't want him sent where they're totally unprepared.

Sam: Our district was more than agreeable to everything that was said.... It was a lot different than I had expected. At Bolidena, they held classes for parents to help prepare for COHs. They warned us that what we wanted and what we would get might be two different things. And they told us about our rights to go to the school board.

Parents of typical children:

Alicia: We heard about Bolidena through friends. We've always heard good things about it. I was working professionally with Bolidena's director as regards this one boy. Someone in my department at the university had had a child there. And I asked another family whose child also went to Liam's day care center.

Beth: For next year, I looked into three [city public] schools: Monroe, Hayes and Jackson. I'm a teacher. I don't teach in the city, but I know teachers in the city. Everyone told me that Jackson was best. So I phoned all three and asked them about certain things.... I also asked if I would be allowed to come and observe. Monroe didn't want me to observe, so I scratched that one. I observed at the other two. Hayes is the one he's supposed to go to. But I liked Jackson better. So we put in our application for a transfer to Jackson.

As regards the parents of special children, there is even less evidence of exploring different alternatives, primarily because there were so few schools that would even consider taking an autistic child. Some parents felt that, as Larry put it (see page 11), "We didn't know what else to do. We had no place else to go. So we sent him there [Bolidena]." When children reached school age, their school districts were required by law to provide for them or find a placement in another district which could do so. Grace (see page 11) describes a situation in which a very limited range of options (two) did exist, but one was clearly unacceptable to her. And her husband, Sam, indicated an awareness, due to the efforts of Bolidena's staff, that they could do something if they were not satisfied with the placement offered by their district. But the amount of "shopping around" that parents can do is clearly very limited when their children's handicapping conditions are as severe as they were in these cases.

Even the sources of information available to parents of special children were severely restricted, as the data from questions 8 and 13 of the questionnaire suggest. Special parents were dependent on having a doctor who could recognize autism (not to be taken for granted) and on a relatively few pre-school programs and/or clinics (see page 13). Parents of typical children, on the other hand, relied on a much more readily accessible circle of neighbors, friends, relatives and professional colleagues, some of whom turned out to be parents of past or present Bolidena students (see page 11 - Alicia).

As the responses to questions 9 and 10 indicate (see page 13), most parents of typical children engaged in relatively limited searches prior to enrolling their children at Bolidena. However, parents of

PARENTS' SEARCH PROCESSES
(from questionnaire)

Question 8: From whom did you first hear about Bolidena?

Question 13: From whom did you gather additional information about Bolidena and/or other schools/programs?

Responses

by 28 mothers of typical children (T)
and 14 mothers of special children (S)

School/program staff:	T-8 <<<<<	18%
	T-13 **********	71%
	S-8 >>	7%
	S-13 ++++++++++	64%
Teachers at child's pre-school program:	T-8 <<	7%
	T-13 *******	25%
	S-8 >>>>>>>>>>	36%
	S-13 ++++++++++	36%
Other educators:	T-8 <<<<<<<<<	32%
	T-13 **********	36%
	S-8 >>>>	14%
	S-13 ++++	14%
Doctors or medical clinics:	T-8	0%
	T-13 *	4%
	S-8 >>>>>>>>>>>>>>	50%
	S-13 ++++++++	29%
Parents of students:	T-8 <<<<<<<<<<<<<	50%
	T-13 **********	43%
	S-8 >>	7%
	S-13 ++	7%

* *

Question 9: Did you visit Bolidena before enrolling your child there?

Question 10A: Did you consider any other schools/programs for your child?

Question 10B: Did you visit any other schools or programs?

Responses

T-9 <<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<	93%	||	S-9 >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	86%
T-10A**********	79%	||	S-10A++++++++++++	50%
T-10B##########	46%	||	S-10B§§§§§	21%

special children were even less likely to report having considered other options or visited other programs.

(3) Advocates of parental choice plans assume that parents will evaluate their children's educational needs and choose the school which best meets those needs. Voucher advocates John Coons and Stephen Sugarman (1978) use the example of a child who has a special talent in art which is not encouraged by the limited resources of her neighborhood school. Fantini (1973) uses the personal example of his own child, who was not responding well to a very highly structured classroom. Magnet schools generally base their appeal on either a special curriculum emphasis (such as art) or a special instructional style (such as open classrooms).

The interpretation of the evidence from Bolidena with regard to this assumption depends on how broadly or narrowly one defines "educational needs". Even given the narrowest definition, there is plenty of evidence to support this assumption. Fritz and Connie (see page 15) are impressed by the "quality of teaching" and "intellectual stimulation" that their three-year-old daughter, Laura, is receiving at Bolidena. And George is concerned about the teaching of "good basic skills, math and reading". Broadening the definition of "educational needs", we have the example of Dan's appreciation of the principal at the school attended by an older child. Jacob expands it further (?) by observing that their son will know other children at his new school, and he and his wife will know some of the teachers. Finally, does Connie's remark about the length of the school day qualify as an "educational need"?

Parents of special children indicate the same sensitivity to a range of educational, quasi-educational and possibly non-educational needs. Thus, Lydia's concerns (see page 15) range from "how the teachers

PARENTS' SELECTION CRITERIA

(from interviews)

Parents of special children:

Lydia: When we went to visit Bolidena, i saw how Shawn reacted. He went right into the classroom while I was talking with the administrators, and he seemed to blend right in with everybody. He was right at home. I wanted him to feel comfortable.

I was impressed by how the teachers handled the special children. It was a very good feeling. Everyone was doing with everyone else, regardless of their problem. The administrators could have talked until they were blue in the face, and it wouldn't have made any difference. It was what I saw in the classroom that counted. There were no kids pointing out that one kid was different. Kids can be so cruel that way. Shawn has to grow up in a world where he'll meet a lot of different people, so he might as well start getting used to that now. That's what tuned me in to Bolidena.

This year, it'll depend on whether the school district will provide what he needs. We'd like to see a teacher aide in the classroom. He's used to a ratio of four adults to fifteen children, so if there's only one teacher and a bigger class that may be a problem. It's a question of whether the school district will provide that. I have a letter from the specialist (who first referred this family to Bolidena) suggesting that an aide would be helpful.... I would prefer a school that's close by and in our district. But it all depends on whether the teachers at Bolidena and the specialist and I feel he will get what he needs.

Parents of typical children:

Fritz: Bolidena's attraction was the quality of teaching. They're so wonderful at handling kids, so skilled.

Connie: We went to the class Laura would attend and saw the teacher working with the typical and untypical kids. Then we talked with the director. I was very impressed. I also liked the intellectual stimulation she would be getting.... I didn't think she was ready for 9-5 day care. Nine to two-thirty seemed just about right.... We also looked at a day care center at this point, and decided that the quality of their program wasn't as good.

Dan: The principal at the public school (attended by an older child in the family) encourages the teachers to send kids down to his office with good work, not just when there are problems. At Halloween, he led the costume parade through the school. In the morning, he stands outside the front door and greets the kids as they arrive. He knows all their names. He holds meetings for parents in homes.

Jacob: Another reason for Jackson is that a lot of kids from his old day care center go there. Kids from Bolidena too. And kids from the church that he knows. We also know some of the teachers there.

George: I think they should teach good basic skills, math and reading.... I'd also like a school that encourages parent involvement.

handled the special children" to "no kids pointing out that one kid was different" to "close by and in our district". Special children have needs that require special attention of parents as well as professionals, so these tend to predominate, but not to the exclusion of needs they share with their typical peers. Lydia's preference that her son go to school "close by" is one that is certainly shared by a great many parents of typical children, as the Alum Rock data have served to illustrate.

Questions 12 and 16 of the questionnaire listed 25 criteria actually mentioned by parents during the interviews (see page 17). Educational criteria tended to predominate in the responses (again, depending on how narrowly these are defined), but this could have been due in part to the phrasing of the questions, which focused on "school characteristics". While there are some interesting differences between parents of typical and of special children, between Bolidena and "next school", the overall picture is one of considerable awareness of and importance of educational criteria.

Conclusions:

This study calls into question some basic assumptions underlying parental choice plans. While educational criteria played an important part in the decisions made by these parents, these are parents whom one might expect to pay a great deal of attention to such criteria because of own professional backgrounds or their children's special needs. Their use of quasi-educational and non-educational criteria, the limited range of options they explored and their general satisfaction with public schools would seem to run counter to the assumptions of parent choice advocates. A follow-up study, drawing on a larger and more diverse group of families, is now being conducted (see Maddaus (1985)).

PARENTS' SELECTION CRITERIA

(from questionnaire)

Question 12: At the time you enrolled your child at Bolidena, what impressed you most about the school? (Check up to five items)

Question 16: Which of the following school characteristics would you consider most important in terms of your child's next school (Check up to 5 items)

Most Frequently Checked Items

by mothers of typical children (T) and special children (S)

Interaction between typical and special children:	T-12 <<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<	75%
	T-16 ********	29%
	S-12 >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	86%
	S-16 ++++++++++++++++++++++++++	93%
Caring and dedication of teachers:	T-12 <<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<	64%
	T-16 *********************	68%
	S-12 >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	79%
	S-16 ++++++++++++++	50%
Individualized methods of instruction:	T-12 <<<<<<<<<<<<	43%
	T-16 *****************	54%
	S-12 >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	57%
	S-16 ++++++++++++++++++++++	79%
Communication with parents:	T-12 <<<<<<<<<<	36%
	T-16 ********	29%
	S-12 >>>>>>>>>>>>>>	50%
	S-16 ++++++++++++	43%
Academic program:	T-12 <<<<<<	21%
	T-16 *****************	54%
	S-12 >>>>>>>	29%
	S-16 +++++++++++++++	50%
Student/teacher ratio:	T-12 <<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<<	79%
	T-16 ********	29%
	S-12 >>>>>>	21%
	s-16 ++++++	21%
Classroom atmosphere:	T-12 <<<<<<<<<<<<<	46%
	T-16 **************	50%
	S-12 >>>>>>>>>>	36%
	S-16 ++++	14%

Other items listed (in order of frequency checked): warmth and friendliness of teachers, class size, training and skills of teachers, progress that students had made, social interaction with other children, structure of the school day, involvement of parents, length of the school day, personality of the director, speech therapist, location of the school, mix of family backgrounds, cost, availability of transportation, ages a child could attend, extra hours worked by staff and school size.

Footnotes:

[1]Richmond, Julius B., "An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of P.L 94-142", The Exceptional Parent (August 1983) Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 14.

[2]Bridge, R. Gary and Julie Blackman, A Study of Alternatives in American Education, Vol. IV: Family Choice in Schooling (Santa Monica, CA; Rand Corporation, 1978), p. 100.

[3]Nault, Richard L. and Susan Uchitelle, "School Choice in the Public Sector: A Case Study of Parental Decision Making" in Michael E. Manley-Casimir, ed., Family Choice in Schooling: Issues and Dilemmas (Lexington, MA; D,C. Heath & Co., 1982) p. 95.

[4]Clerico, Donald R., "Searching for Peace of Mind: Parents' Rationales for Enrolling their Children in a Christian School" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1982) p. 134.

[5]Barnes, Ellen B., "Peer Interaction Between Typical and Special Children in an Integrated Setting: An Observational Study" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1978), p. 321.

[6]Ibid., pp. 320-321.

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